COVID 19 RESPONSE BY SOPPECOM

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About SOPPECOM

Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), is a registered non-governmental organisation established in 1991 and is based in Pune. SOPPECOM develops and promotes alternative developmental pathways, especially for the rural areas, through implementation of innovative projects, resource literacy, knowledge generation, capacity building, participatory technology development, outreach and dissemination, stakeholder platforms and dialogue and networking. SOPPECOM has been primarily working in water and allied sectors like land, agriculture and energy with the aim of enhancing the sustainable livelihood options of the rural population.

COVID 19 Response: SOPPECOM's approach and plan

Maharashtra is the worst affected state due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The nationwide lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has severely impacted the lives of the poorer sections of the state consisting of daily wage labourers, construction site labourers, farm labourers, rickshaw drivers, brick kiln workers, domestic helps, deserted/ single/ widowed/ divorced women labourers, artisans, sex workers, labourers at stone crushing units, nomadic tribes and adivasis. The condition of these social sections is particularly precarious especially in small towns like the taluka headquarters where no safety net exists for them. It is these social sections that SOPPECOM is primarily engaging with in its response to COVID-19 with the active participation of social activists and organisations (see this link for a detailed discussion: https://www.indiawaterportal.org/articles/vulnerable-time-covid-19).

SOPPECOM's response to COVID 19 and consequent lockdown is spaced out in three phases as described briefly:

- In Phase One, the emphasis is on immediate relief and most needy families from vulnerable communities would be provided the essential food items (dry ration), and hygiene essentials like soaps and detergents. Our target is to reach out to 2500 families or more.
- In Phase Two, the effort would be to provide some minimum support to the most needy families (about one-third families from Phase One): support school going children from these families to buy essentials like text books, note books and other stationary so that the children can go to their schools once the schools reopen in June;

support the most needy families to meet costs of buying seeds and other inputs and also to partially meet the costs of land preparation so that they can do Kharif sowing in time; and support supplementary livelihood activities.

- Phase Three is going to be a long-term engagement. During this phase the effort would be to work with the social activists in the area for awareness building and also improving their capacities to engage with such incidents/events/disasters in the future. The themes/issues that could be taken up include: 1) building more self-reliant and resilient communities and strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and local self-government institutions in small towns, 2) disaster preparedness, 3) safety nets for the most vulnerable communities, 4) database and information sharing system for quick response actions, and 5) rethinking development – alternatives to the present developmental model (especially in areas like agriculture, livelihoods, water, energy, health, etc.) that are informed by equity, social justice, sustainability and democratisation.

Currently we are in the Phase I of our programme

Funds raised

SOPPECOM is an existing partner of Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative (APPI) for a project to implement the project "Restructuring of the Tembu Lift Irrigation Scheme on the basis of integrated water resource management, equity and participation to ensure water and livelihood security in Atpadi taluka, Sangli district, South Maharashtra". APPI provided a top up grant of **Rs. 10 Lakhs** for providing COVID 19 relief in Sangli district. Arghyam Trust, Bengaluru has agreed to provide a grant of **Rs. 5 lakhs**. SOPPECOM also made a wider appeal (see this link for the appeal: http://www.soppecom.org/pdf/COVID-19-Response-by-SOPPECOM-appeal.pdf) to raise funds which was circulated to SOPPECOM's friends, sympathisers and partners, various networks that we are part of, our own contacts including friends and family members. Our appeal has received a good response. Through the appeal we have raised **Rs 3,80,395**. We are sure more contributions would come in.

Selection of families for relief

For Phase I it was important to priortize the relief operations for those communities that were in desperate need of ration kits and therefore to reach out to such families, we listed out certain criteria for the activists and organizations so that they could easily identify families, where they are located and expedite the relief operations. The activists prioritised migrant labour, daily wage earners, landless labour, single and/or deserted women families, nomadic tribes, and so on. In some of the talukas like Junnar, they went around in a more systematic manner using a set of criteria for selection of the families. The criteria used are as follows:

- None of the family members works in government / private organization
- Family member are agricultural labourers or daily wage labourers that have to go out everyday to find work (example: construction site workers)
- Family belonging to migrant labourers with no ration cards
- Family belonging to nomadic tribes
- Family belonging to non-agricultural incomes who meet ends on daily earnings like barbers, cobblers etc
- Single or deserted or widowed women and their families
- Landless people and/ or family holding a completely rainfed agricultural land less 2.5 acres

Operationalizing the relief operations for Phase I

Our activist friends from South Maharashtra belonging to different grassroots level organizations and people's movements like the Shramik Mukti Dal, Shramik Mukti Dal (Democratic), Vidrohi Sanskrutik Chalwal, Samaan Pani Vaatap Sangharsh Chalwal, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samudaay and Kisan Sabha managed all aspects of the relief kit distribution. With the permission from the local police authorities and taluka administration, these activists have done a lot of ground work to find out the families/ people that have been badly

Local volunteers collecting information of vulnerable communities. Top: Nomadic tribe working on road construction sites; Bottom: Brick kiln site (Pic courtesy: Ashok Jadhav, Kolhapur)

affected due to lockdown, and who lost their means of livelihood and were left with no food and cash. They prepared a list of all these families/ people and shared with SOPPECOM. Accordingly, the money required to procure and pack the kits containing essential food and hygiene items was provided to the local organizations or sent directly to the shops from where these items were sourced. The kits were procured and distributed by the activists. The distribution of the kits was done in close coordination with the local government authorities and the police observing all the safety protocols including physical distancing. In most places the taluka officials and the district/taluka police officers were also present.

Families who have received the ration kits

With your support we have been able to reach out to 1435 families. These identified families are daily wage workers and agriculture labourers, brick kilners, migrant labourers, daily earners like those who give camel rides to children or those who sell ice gollas (ghare ghar), domestic worlers, rickshaw drivers, construction workers, single and/or deserted women, widow farmers, labourers adivasis and nomadic tribes. Please see below the details of the beneficiaries.

Name of Taluka	District	No. of families covered	Social groups
Atpadi	Sangli	502	Daily wage labourers, migrant labourers, artisans (barbers/ cobblers), single/ widowed women, sugarcane cutters, brick kiln workers, physically challenged
Ashta (Walwa)	Sangli	62	Ragpickers, waste collectors, VJNT community
Shirala	Sangli	150	construction workers, single/ widowed women
Islampur (Walwa)	Sangli	151	newspaper distribution boys and sellers, construction site workers
Sangli town (Miraj)	Sangli	100	domestic help, gardeners, car washers, rickshaw drivers

Name of Taluka	District	No. of families covered	Social groups
Miraj	Sangli	150	rickshaw drivers, construction site labourers
Total number in Sangli district			**1115**
Ajra	Kolhapur	60	single/ widowed women, brick kiln workers
Total number in Kolhapur district			**60**
Junnar	Pune	110	Agriculture labourers, daily wage labourers, senior citizens with no help at home, adivasis
Ambegaon	Pune	150	Agriculture labourers, daily wage labourers, adivasis
Total number in Pune district			**260**
Grand total			**1435**

Stories from the ground

We have been able to cover a lot of ground due to the generous support we have received from APPI, friends, sympathisers and partners of SOPPECOM, friends form various networks and also personal friends, immediate family members and relatives. We have been receiving a lot of responses and stories from our local contacts who are carrying out the relief work. We would love to share some stories from the locations where the distribution of ration kits has been completed.

"Helping Hand for women in Sangli town"

In Sangli town our local partner Vrindavan Vilas Sahakari Gruhsamuha Yojana Sanstha reached out to 100 families most of which belonged to single/ widowed/ deserted women either working as daily wage labourers or domestic helps. They also provided ration kits to rickshaw drivers and families doing odd jobs in informal sector like gardening, car washing, laundry. The distribution of the kits was done with the help of the Local Crime Branch officer, Shri Pingale. Rajesh Karadkar played a key role in organising the relief programme in Sangli town. Dr.Bharat Patankar provided the necessary guidance.

"School alumni come together to distribute kits to needy in Miraj"

Mr. Gill, Superintendent of Police, Sangli District distributing kits to the people

With the help of Balasaheb Patil, Gautam Katkar, Naushan Mulla, Sagar Mali, Mahesh Chougula, Atish Agrawal, Salgar, Ganesh Vadgavkar, Mandar Vasgadekar, Avinash Jadhav, Shashikant Aatak, Satish Mane, Santosh Mane and Allahbaksh kazi, alumni of the New English School and activists of Virdrohi Sansrkutik Chalwal ration kits were distributed to 100 families in Miraj town. There were strict lockdown restrictions during this period. However, the Superintendent officer of Police, Sangli District, Shri Gill proactively helped in the coordination of the effort. Shri Gill himself inaugurated the event by distributing the first few kits.

"800 *families in Atpadi taluka get ration kits*"

With the help of our local partners – Shramik Mukti Dal, Samaan Pani Vaatap Sangharsh Chalwal and Manganga Udyog Samuh, about 800 families from 5 villages in Atpadi taluka were helped with ration kits to help them survive the lockdown. Of these 800, SOPPECOM provided the resources for 502 kits and the remaining 300 kits were mobilized by our friend Anandrao Patil and his friends. Most of the families are agricultural labourers, artisans, daily wage labourers, migrant workers, physically challenged persons and widowed/ single/ deserted women.

"Calm after the storm"

In Sakhrale near Islampur (Sangli district), local activist of Vidrohis Sanskrutik Chalwal reached out to 150 families. Due to the heavy rainfall and storm one day before the distribution the houses of the people were damaged. The people were in serious trouble, first due to loss of livelihood and second due to the rain. However, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Shri Krishnat Pingale personally helped out with the distribution of the kits and saw that every family was given ration kits. The families were overwhelmed with the support they received

said Shri Deepak Kothavale who coordinated the effort. Shri Dhanaji Gurav provided the necessary guidance.

"100 *families in Shirala taluka receive help to tide over the lockdown*

In Shirala taluka, our friends and local activists Shri Dattatray Patil and Shri Maruti Rokade helped in distributing ration kits to 100 families, most of them who were landless labourers and homeless people.

"Single or deserted or widowed women reached out in Ajra taluka, Kolhapur"

60 families belonging to people working in brick kilns and landless labourers were distributed with ration kits to help survive the lockdown. Out of the 60 families, 47 families were of either single or deserted of widowed women. The daughters of these women were also provided with personal hygiene and sanitation supplies. Padmini Pilankar organised the distribution with support from Ashok Jadhav. Tehsildar of Ajra Shri Ahir, Block Development Officer Shri Vagh, Agricultural Officer Shri Momin and Hattivade Sarpanch Shri Satish Kumbhar, Gramsevak Shri Vaibhav Gurav and Police Officer Shri Bhange were present the event.

"Remote villages in the tribal regions of Pune district breathe a sigh a relief"

110 families of agricultural labourers in the remote tribal villages of Junnar taluka in Pune district were provided with ration kits to survive the lockdown. The communities here were stranded without food supplies due to lack of transport under the nationwide lockdown. These ration kits were a breather for these families as they have absolutely no source of income left to buy food and the poor accessibility to public distribution systems.

Coverage by the print media

The local print media was able to cover some events of the distribution of kits. Some clippings from the print media are shown below.

बेंगलोरच्या अझिम प्रेमजी फिलॉनत्रोफिकचे गरजुंना किट वाटप

सांगली ■ प्रतिनिधी

येथील वृंदावन व्हीलाज सोसायटीच्या सहकार्याने श्रमिक मुक्ती दल यांच्या माध्यमातून अझिम प्रेमजी फिलॉनत्रोफिक इनिशिएटिव्ह, बेंगलोर या राष्ट्रीय स्तरावरील संस्थेने १०० गरजू व दारिद्र्य रेषेखालील कुटुंबांना जीवनावश्यक वस्तूंचे एक हजार रुपये किमतीचे किट वाटप केले.

या किटमध्ये दैनंदिन जीवनात आवश्यक असलेली धान्ये, कडधान्ये, तेल, मीठ, मसाला चटणी, औषधे, साबण अशा १३ महत्वपूर्ण वस्तूंचा समावेश आहे.

अजीम प्रेमजी यांनी स्थापन केलेल्या या संस्थेच्या वतीने देशात विकासात्मक सेवा कार्य करणाऱ्या विविध संस्थांना सहकार्य केले जाते. यावेळी दिलेली मदत ही पुणेस्थित सोसायटी फॉर प्रोमोटिंग पार्टिसिपेटिव इकोसिस्टीम मॅनेजमेंट या संस्थेच्या माध्यमातून पाठवण्यात आली होती. ही संस्था गेली तीस वर्षे विविध ठिकाणी विकासात्मक कामे करणाऱ्या संस्थांना मदत करण्यासाठी कार्यरत आहे.

जिल्हा पोलीस गुन्हे अन्वेषण विभागाचे प्रमुख श्रीकांत पिंगळे यांच्या हस्ते वृंदावन सोसायटीचे उपाध्यक्ष राजेश कराडकर व सोसायटीच्या सदस्यांनी लॉकडाऊनचे सर्व नियम पाळत शिस्तबद्धपणे या कीट चे वाटप केले.

वृंदावन व्हिलाजचे अमोल संकपाळ, श्रीमती सुरेखा पाटील, संजय काळगी, अर्जुनसिंग राठोड, अशोक पाटील, लोंढे, मदन काळे, चंद्रकांत बोबडे, बाळासाहेब पाटील, पवन सूर्यवंशी आदिंनी याकामी विशेष परिश्रम घेतले.

अझिम प्रेमजी फिलॉनत्रोफिक इनिशिएटिव्ह, बेंगलोर या राष्ट्रीय स्तरावरील संस्थेमार्फत दारिद्र्य रेषेखालील कुटुंबांना जीवनावश्यक वस्तूंचे किट वाटप करताना कंपनीच्या पदाधिकाऱ्यांसह इतर मान्यवर.

साखराळे : गरजू कुटुंबांना किट देताना पोलिस उपअधीक्षक कृष्णात पिंगळे. शेजारी पोलिस निरीक्षक नारायण देशमुख.

इस्लामपुरात गरिबांना धान्य वाटप

इस्लामपूर : अजीम प्रेमजी ट्रस्ट (बंगळूर), सोपेकॉम (पुणे) आणि विद्रोही सांस्कृतिकतर्फे वाळवा तालुक्यातील १५० निराधार कुटुंबांना इस्लामपुरातील माणुसकीचं नातं या ग्रुपच्या पुढाकाराने अन्नधान्य किटचे वाटप करण्यात आले. पोलिस उपअधीक्षक कृष्णात पिंगळे यांच्या पुढाकाराने हा उपक्रम झाला. या उपक्रमासाठी धनाजी गुरव व सेवानिवृत्त प्राचार्य विश्वास सायनाकर यांचे सहकार्य लाभले. या किटमध्ये तांदूळ, तूरडाळ, गोडेतेल, मीठ, साखर, चहा पावडर, आटा, साबण, निरमा, मोहरी, तीळ व गोडा मसाला असे सुमारे ११०० रुपयांचे साहित्य होते. या सर्व १५० किटसाठी संबंधितांनी एक लाख ५० हजार रुपयांचे सहाय्य केले. साखराळे येथे पोलिस उपाधिक्षक कृष्णात पिंगळे यांच्या तसेच पोलिस निरीक्षक नारायण देशमुख यांच्या हस्ते गरजूंना कीट वाटण्यात आले. शनिवारी (ता. १८) रात्री झालेल्या वादळी पावसाने नुकसान झालेल्या कुटुंबीयांनाही किट देण्यात आले.

नोकरदारांकडून शेतमजुरांना वस्तू

जुन्नर : तांबे (ता. जुन्नर) येथील नोकरदार ग्रामस्थांनी अतिदुर्गम भागातील ११० शेतमजूर कुटुंबांना जीवनावश्यक वस्तूंचे किट वाटप केले. दहा वाड्या-वस्त्यांवरील मजुरांना यामुळे दिलासा मिळाला आहे. सोपेकॉम संस्था पुणे, ललित जोशी स्पोर्टस फाउंडेशन, विद्यार्थी संघ व गावातील नोकरदार यांच्या पुढाकारातून हा उपक्रम राबविल्याचे सरपंच कविता मडके यांनी सांगितले. या शेतमजूर, भूमिहीन, वृद्ध व विधवा कुटुंबप्रमुख असलेल्या घरांसाठी ललित जोशी, विकास मडके, शशिकांत मडके, किरण लोहकरे यांनी पुढाकार घेतला.

दैनिक तुफान क्रांती

माणगंगा उद्योग, समूह, श्रमिक मुक्ती, दल, पाणी संघर्ष चळवळ अजीम प्रेमजी ए पी पी आय पुणे, मार्फत गरजू निराधार अर्थपंग याना डिस्टन्स ठेऊन जीवनावश्यक किट चे वाटप

शैक्षणिक वार्ता

मदत नव्हे सामाजिक कर्तव्य - शिराळा तालुक्यात मदतसाहित्य वाटप

अजिम प्रेमजी ट्रस्ट पुणे, सोपेकॉम ट्रस्ट पुणे आणि विद्रोही सांस्कृतिक चळवळ महाराष्ट्र राज्य या तिन्ही संस्थांचा पुढाकार

Plan ahead

As mentioned earlier we have reached out to 1435 families. We want to try to reach out to another 1200 families. Our activist friends have already prepared the lists of families. We are also reaching out to the sex workers from Sangli through SANGRAM, organisatiion based in Sangli. Similarly, we also would be reaching out to those impacted living in the buffer zones of Chandoli National Park (Hatkanangale taluka, Kolhapur) and those impacted by the Koyna back waters (Patan taluka, Satara). The money left from Phase I (after covering all these families) will be utilized for Phase II and III. You shall receive regular updates from us regarding the progress of the programme.

“A big ‘thank you’ to all”

Over the past couple of weeks, the enormous task of providing relief to more than 1400 families, and that too distributed over nearly 10 locations, has been achieved (and it is still ongoing to cover another 1200 odd families). It would be quite an understatement to say that this would not have been possible without the tireless and sustained efforts of all our activist friends from the region who have been working on the ground. Unlike NGOs, they did not have the infrastructure, nor the support of paid staff, to undertake this task. Kudos to all of them.

We would like to thank Dr. Bharat Patankar, Shri Anandarao Bapu Patil, Shri Dhanaji Gurav, Shri Rajesh Karadkar, Shri Dattatray Patil, Shri Maruti Rokade, Shri Sameer Gaikwad, Shri Deepak Kothavale from Sangli district, Shri Ashok Jadhav, Shri Babu Metkar and Smt. Padmini Pilankar from Kolhpur District and Shri Amol Waghmare and our colleague Shri, Kiran Lohakare from Pune district for efficiently co-ordinating with us to achieve smooth distribution of the kits and in timely manner.

We would sincerely thank the police department, especially the Superintendent of Police, Sangli district Shri Gill and DYSP Shri Krishnat Pingale for proactively helping out with the distribution process. A big thank you to the tehsildars, local authorities and sarpanchs for helping out in the process. We are also thankful to all shop owners who did a wonderful job of providing the necessary groceries in a timely manner and very often at concessional rates.

A special thanks to Azim Premji Philathropic Initiatives (APPI), Bengaluru for providing us the initial financial support for 1000 families in Sangli district. Also, a big thanks to Arghyam Trust, Bengaluru for providing the financial support to cover about 425 families. Last but not the least a big shout out to all friends and sympathizers of SOPPECOM, our friends in various networks and collectives, and our personal friends, families and relatives for coming forward and contributing to this cause. We also acknowledge the efforts put in by our colleague Pratima Medhekar for seeing to the timely financial transactions and keeping the accounts.
We are truly overwhelmed with support we have received. Together we all shall overcome this difficult time. Thank you all once again and expecting your continued support.

With warm regards

K. J. Joy, Abraham Samuel, Sarita Bhagat, Kiran Lohakare and Neha Bhadbhade
SOPPECOM, Pune